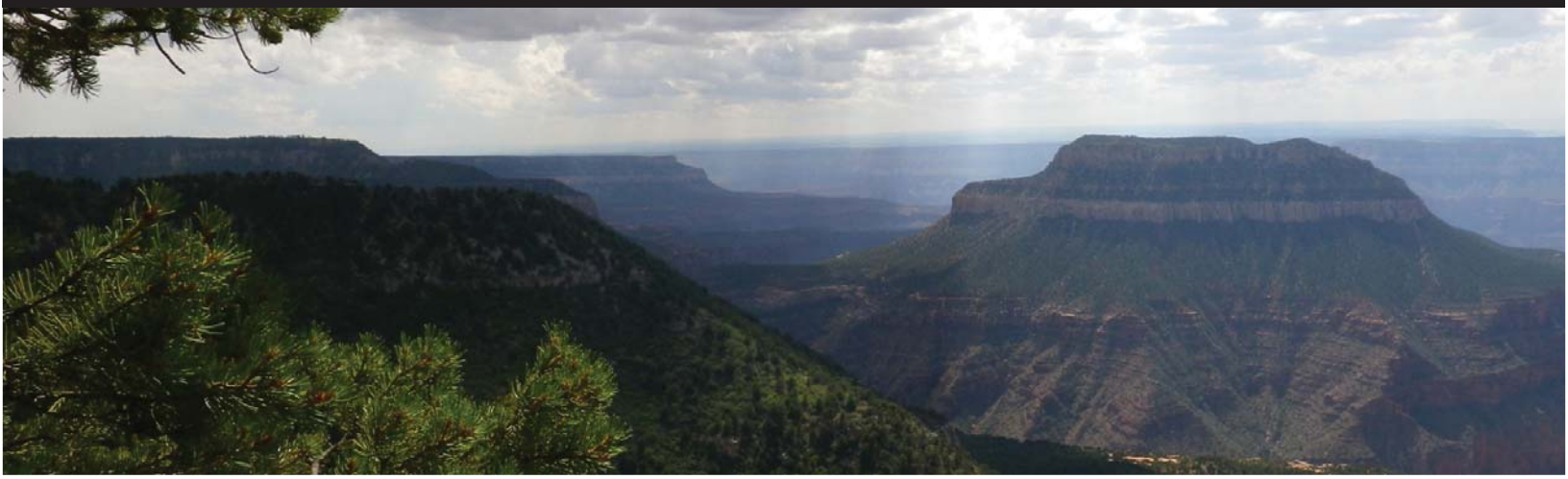
Bison Herd Reduction Environmental Assessment

Grand Canyon National Park



National Park Service Would Like Your Input!

The National Park Service (NPS) requests your input on changes to the scope of the Bison Management Plan at the Grand Canyon National Park (the park). The project is shifting from development of a long-term management plan to an effort focused on initial herd reduction. As a result, the park will complete an environmental assessment (EA) instead of an environmental impact statement (EIS). The NPS would like your thoughts on the purpose and need statements, proposed action, and other issues.

Project Background and Current Status

The NPS and cooperators agree that the free-ranging bison occupying the park's North Rim lands and adjacent jurisdictions are native wildlife at the southwest edge of their historic range. The current population density, now estimated between 400 and 600 animals, is not consistent with what biologists would expect to see at the edge of the species' distribution.

The NPS and cooperators also agree the bison should be managed collaboratively across a multi-jurisdictional landscape and that the population should be reduced as quickly as possible to minimize potential effects on other natural and cultural resources.

In spring 2014, in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the NPS initiated public scoping for an EIS to develop a long-term, coordinated approach to manage current and future impacts of bison on the park's natural and cultural resources.

As a result of the change in scope to initial herd reduction, the NPS now proposes to complete an EA instead of an EIS. The EA would evaluate an initial bison population reduction and other actions (e.g., localized fencing of sensitive park resources and monitoring) conducted in a manner that is consistent with established, long-term, and collaborative bison management goals described below.

Did you know?
Information on this project is available at http://parkplanning.nps.gov/grca_bison. At this site, you can follow the progress of the project, download project documents, and provide comments at critical points of the project.

Sunrise from Cape Royal on the North Rim

Purpose and Need

The purpose of this action is to collaborate with partners to reduce the bison population density as quickly as possible so it is consistent with being at the southwest edge of the species' historic range. The action also would be consistent with established, long-term, and collaborative bison management goals.

Action is needed now because:

- In the 1990s, the bison herd, which has been managed by the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD) at House Rock Wildlife Area (HRWA) since 1929, began spending more time off HRWA and venturing into the North Rim of the park. Most bison now spend a majority of their time inside the park.
- The bison population continues to increase and biologists estimate there are currently between 400 and 600 bison on the Kaibab Plateau, which results in a higher density than would have likely occurred at the edge of their historic range.
- At the current bison abundance and density, NPS resource specialists are concerned about impacts to sensitive park resources, such as water, vegetation, soils, and archeological sites, and values, such as wilderness character.

Cooperators on this Project

Intertribal Buffalo Council

Arizona Game and Fish Department

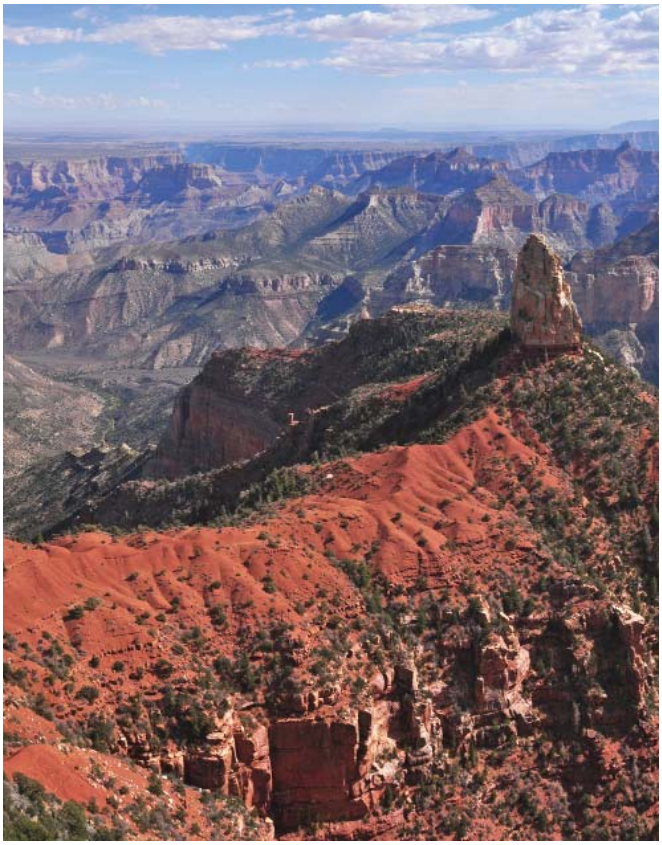
US Forest Service

Bureau of Land Management

Proposed Action

The proposed action is the initial NPS proposal, as developed with stakeholders and cooperators, to address the purpose and need for taking action.

- The NPS proposes to implement a suite of management tools (e.g., capture/removal, sharpshooting, and localized fencing of sensitive park resources) in collaboration with state and federal partners, to reduce the bison population to approximately 80 to 200.
- The NPS also proposes to develop and implement monitoring protocols to help improve understanding and to inform decisions about long-term bison management at a very low density, including any potential follow-on planning and compliance. Monitoring could focus on evaluating the effectiveness of management tools and gaining a better understanding of resource conditions and bison ecology in the Grand Canyon and adjacent area. Actions could adapt as appropriate to gain additional knowledge of bison behavior and interrelationships with other resources and values.



Point Imperial

Long-Term Bison Management Goals

Initial bison management actions would be compatible with the following long-term established and collaborative bison management goals:

- Improve the ability of the NPS to conserve other natural and cultural resources on the park's North Rim;
- Consider tribal concerns;
- Strengthen partnerships for, and further public education about, the Department of the Interior's Bison Conservation Initiative goals of restoring bison herds to their ecological and cultural role on appropriate landscapes; and
- Support federal and state partner goals for a free-ranging bison population that allows for public bison hunting and viewing opportunities on the Kaibab National Forest.

Bison in the Little Park Meadow adjacent to the North Rim Entrance Road.

View from Roosevelt Point

Next Steps/Where We are in the Process

NPS and its cooperating agencies are preparing this EA in accordance with NEPA. Important steps in the NEPA process and an anticipated timeline are as follows:

February 25 to March 26, 2016	30-day Public Comment Period — **WE ARE HERE**
Summer 2016	EA Available for Public Review for 30 days/ Public Meeting on Public Review EA
Fall 2016	NPS signs Finding of No Significant Impact (As Appropriate)

How to Comment

Submit comments electronically at: http://parkplanning.nps.gov/grca_bison (preferred method).

Submit written comments at the park's offices in Flagstaff or by mail to:

Superintendent
Grand Canyon National Park
P.O. Box 129
Grand Canyon, Arizona 86023

To be most useful to the planning process, we request you submit comments no later than March 26, 2016.

Please include your full name and address and/or email address with the comments, so we may add you to our mailing list for future notices about this process. You should be aware that your entire comment—including personal identifying information such as your address, phone number, and e-mail address—may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.